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ABSTRACT

The reading achievement of 31 male juvenile delinquents was analyzed and compared to previous reading research on similar subjects. The subjects were nine learning disabled students, five emotionally handicapped students, five educable mentally handicapped students, and twelve students who were in the process of being evaluated for special education placement. The pretest and posttest battery consisted of the "Wide Range Achievement Test" (WRAT), the "KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test," and the "Analytical Reading Inventory" (ARI). The diagnostic test results were used to create two hours of tutored instruction each week for the students. Posttests revealed significant gains on the WRAT and the KeyMath Diagnostic Test. Results from the ARI indicated a mean total reading gain of 0.3 months and a total mean instructional level gain of 0.2 months. A comparison of these data to the results from similar research suggested that the expected discrepancy of two to four years between achievement level and potential for juvenile delinquents was an exaggeration. Probably the most interesting aspect of the study was the delinquents' total lack of decoding skills beyond the use of initial consonants. (RL)

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READING ACHIEVEMENT

AND

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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There is evidence to suggest that academic and academic-related problems are more prevalent among disruptive and delinquent adolescents. Jacobson (1974), Mauser (1974), Poremba (1976), Sabatino (1973) and Silberberg and Silberberg (1971) suggested that disruptive and delinquent youth display an inordinate prevalence of reading and/or learning disabilities. The Comptroller General of the United States (1977) stated that the evidence accumulated indicated that youth with learning problems who fail to achieve run a risk of delinquency. Mauser (1974) stated that today's delinquent has an average age of 13.5 years, an average intelligence quotient of 95 and an average discrepancy of two to four years between his achievement level and his achievement potential. Schlichter and Ratcliff (1971) also stated that court records indicated that "referred delinquents displayed a 2-4 year discrepancy between achievement and achievement potential after seven years of enrollment in public schools".

METHOD

Population. There is no commonly accepted definition of juvenile delinquency. Some of the terms applied include: 1) legal delinquency, 2) detected delinquency, 3) agency delinquency, 4) alleged delinquency, 5) adjudged delinquency and 6) committed (incarcerated) delinquents (Carr, 1950). Most researchers involved in the study of juvenile delinquency could probably accept the phenomenon as norm-violating behavior. However, it is not the intent of the paper to argue that point. This discussion is limited to the analysis of reading achievement among a special population within an incarcerated adolescent population.

Subjects were selected from the schools operated by the South Carolina Department of Youth Services in Columbia, South Carolina. All subjects were participating in the regular curriculum. None were self-contained in special education classes. Thirty-one males were selected. The group consisted of nine learning disabled students, five emotionally handicapped students, five educable mentally handicapped students and twelve students

who were in the process of being evaluated for special education placement. All were experiencing academic difficulty to some degree.

Procedure. The group, which consisted of the total special education population, was administered a pretest and a posttest with the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) Two administrations were approxiamtely ten weeks apart. The group was also administered the KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test and the Analytical Reading Inventory. Item responses from the two diagnostic tests were used to determine specific strengths and weaknesses. Based upon these identified weaknesses the students were tutored for two hours each week by a regular classroom teacher who was enrolled in a graduate course offered through the University Program for Excepational Children, "Educational Procedures for Specific Learning Disabilities". Posttesting followed the tutoring intervention program approxiamtely one week. Specifics included the following:

1) The tutored group continued to follow the regular class schedule; however, they received individual tutoring for one hour, two times per week for a total of 18 tutoring sessions.

2) Prior to the beginning of instruction, the students were administered a standardized achievement test (WRAT). Two diagnostic inventories were also administered: the Analytical Reading Inventory (Woods and Moe, 1977) and the KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test (Connolly, Nachtman & Pritchett, 1971).

3) Test results pertaining to the diagnostic evaluation were made available to each tutor.

4) At the end of the instructional period, all subjects were administered posttests using all the instruments that were used in the pretest battery.

5) Means and standard devaitions were computed. A test of significance was also computed.

RESULTS

Table I

Means on Numeric Variables

Variable		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reading-Raw Score	Pretest	35	52.42	17.892
Reading-Grade Equivalent	"	35	4.060	3.123
Spelling-Raw Score	"	35	33.714	8.020
Spelling-Grade Equivalent	"	35	3.349	1.932
Math-Raw Score	"	35	31.743	5.293
Math-Grade Equivalent	"	35	4.251	1.225
Reading-Raw Score	Posttest	35	53.771	17.421
Reading-Grade Equivalent	"	35	4.186	3.052
Spelling-Raw Score	"	35	35.000	10.608
Spelling-Grade Equivalent	"	35	3.983	3.448
Math-Raw Score	"	35	32.571	5.585
Math-Grade Equivalent	"	35	4.491	1.343
KeyMath-Raw Score	Pretest	24	116.292	30.809
KeyMath-Grade Equivalent	"	24	5.267	5.985
KeyMath-Raw Score	Posttest	24	129.317	35.980
KeyMath-Grade Equivalent	"	24	5.771	4.932

Table II

Gains on Variables

				T
Reading-Raw Gain	35	1.34285714	3.31611801	2.40
Reading-Grade Equivalent Gain	35	0.12571429	0.46925652	1.58
Spelling-Raw Gain	35	1.28571429	5.18805998	1.47
Spelling-Grade Equivalent Gain	35	0.63428571	2.34331877	1.60
Math-Raw Gain	35	0.82857143	2.12112227	2.31
Math-Grade Equivalent Gain	35	0.24000000	0.58671568	2.42
KeyMath-Raw Gain	24	13.02500000	10.29466937	6.20
KeyMath-Grade Equivalent Gain	24	0.50416667	1.36014039	1.82

Significant gains at the .05 level of significance (1.69010 or greater)

Significant gains at the .05 level of significance included a reading raw score (t = 2.40), a math score gain (t = 2.31) and a math gade equivalent gain (t = 2.42) from the Wide Range Acievement Test. The KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test raw score gain yeild a t = 6.20 and the grade equivalent gain yielded a t = 1.82. There were no significant gains in spelling; however, spelling was not taught by any of the tutors.

TABLE II

ANALYTICAL READING INVENTORY

Silent Reading Inventory Instructional Level		Oral Reading Inventory Instructional Level	
Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
3	3	4	4
P	P	-P	-P
-P	P	-P	P
8	8	8	8
2	4	1	2
-P	-P	-P	-P
5	5	5	5
3	3	3	3
-P	-P	-P	-P
-P	-P	-P	P
P	P	-P	-P
-P	-P	-P	-P
-P	-P	-P	-P
2	2	3	3
-P	-P	P	P
-P	-P	-P	-P
-P	-P	-P	-P
2	3	2	2
1	3	1	1
P	1	-P	-P
2	3	2	2
-P	P	-P	P
7	8	8	9
3	3	4	4
-P	-P	-P	-P
1	1	1	1
3	3	3	3
1	1	P	1
1	1	2	2
P	1	1	1
1	2	1	1

N= 31
P= Primer
-P= Below Primer

Results from the Analytical Reading Inventory indicated that the mean pretest instructional level in silent reading comprehension was 1.5 (Primer = ½, level I = 1, level II = 2, etc.). The mean posttest instructional level was 1.8 with a total gain score of .3 months. Oral reading accuracy mean pretest instructional level was 1.5. Posttest mean instructional level was 1.7 with a total gain score of .2 months.

An analysis of silent reading comprehension questions suggested that most of the errors at the primer level consisted of errors in main idea, facts and terminology. Level I errors were in the areas of fact and terminology, Level II in the areas of facts and inference. Above Level II the errors were scattered as very few read above that level. It may be noted that there are usually two factual questions at each level and after primer level there are two terminology questions at each level.

A total of 221 oral reading errors were recorded as substitutions. In comparison, very few other errors were recorded. Aided words were recorded 84 times, omissions 48 times, insertions 17, hesitations 14 and self-corrections 12. Repetitions were rarely recorded. All of the substitutions recorded made use of initial consonants alone or made no use of any phonetic analysis.

DISCUSSION

If, as other reports have indicated, juvenile delinquent's have a mean age of 13.5 years, a special education population may be older. The mean age of the learning disabled population in this study was 14.4, the emotionally handicapped 14.6, the educable mentally handicapped 15.7 and the identified awaiting placement 15.4. A discrepancy of 2 to 4 years between achievement level and potential for a juvenile delinquent population is inflated in terms of an incarcerated special education population. Even though the scores were extremely higher on the Wide Range Acheivement Test than the Analytical Reading Inventory, the tests are very different and it is almost certain that the levels reported on the Analytical Reading Inventory reflect the truer instructional levle in reading. Probably the most interesting aspect of the study is

the total lack of decoding skills beyond the use of initial consonants.

The currect study does not permit a conclusion as to why these students read so poorly. Are there factors interacting with emotional and social needs and/or academic needs? Did their particular disability interact with these factors? When did they begin to fail? Why weren't they identified before incarceration?

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